

COLA *FAST FACTS* 35-2015

COLA Patient Safety Program – Universal Precautions

COLA began the COLA Patient Safety Program in 2008 with the intent of focusing on areas in laboratory medicine that are found to have high error rates and significant impact on patient safety. COLA is also focused on reducing the frequency of citations for criteria that impact, or can potentially impact, patient safety. Through this program, COLA will identify an existing COLA criterion or patient safety issue as the patient safety goal for each year, and provide education on good laboratory practices for implementation of that safety goal. The program has also been integrated into the COLA survey process.

The COLA Patient Safety Goal for 2015 is:

FAC 17: Are universal precautions observed when handling specimens?

Universal precautions are now required by OSHA; it is no longer an employee option. Employers can be fined if they do not require that their employees follow universal precautions when they come in contact with blood or other regulated bodily fluids.

According to the Occupational and Safety Health Administration (OSHA):¹

- Universal Precautions is an approach to infection control to treat all human blood and body fluids as if they contain pathogens.
- The greatest risks of exposure to healthcare workers who come into contact with blood and body fluids are to HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C viruses.
- Employees are required to observe Universal Precautions in order to prevent infection as a result of contact with blood and other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) such as body fluids.
- Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves, masks, and gowns must be used when handling blood or OPIM or when exposure is anticipated.

Proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and providing safer medical devices can greatly reduce transmission of infection from exposure to human blood and OPIM. Consider these facts about blood borne pathogen exposure:

- As of 2010, 57 documented HIV transmissions and 143 possible transmissions among healthcare workers had been reported in the United States.²
- Three out of every 1,000 needle stick injuries will result in HIV infection if left untreated.²
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are approximately 8,700 Hepatitis B infections in healthcare workers with occupational exposure to blood and other potentially infectious materials in the United States each year. Approximately 200 deaths occur each year in healthcare workers due to these infections.³

Employers must stress the importance of wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees who are at risk of exposure. In addition, employees must use engineering controls, including safer medical devices, in order to most effectively avoid percutaneous injuries from contaminated sharps.

Think about this important patient safety goal, and take steps to ensure compliance in your laboratory.

¹ <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/hospital/hazards/univprec/univ.html>

² www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/other/occupational.html

³ www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=PREAMBLES&p_id=806



Accreditation Education Innovation

9881 Broken Land Parkway Columbia, MD 20146 800-981-9881

www.COLA.org www.COLACentral.org www.LabUniversity.org

COLA is a physician-directed organization whose purpose is to promote excellence in laboratory medicine and patient care through a program of voluntary education, consultation, and accreditation.

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